

The Invention of Prestige:

***People on the Mountain and the Politics of the National*¹**

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Emberek a havason/People on the Mountain (István Szőts, 1941) is one of only a handful of Hungarian wartime films to have gained canonical status. It is commonly cited as the first Hungarian film of true artistic merit and a film that anticipated, if not inspired, the Italian neorealist movement. Celebrated at the time of its release at home and abroad, it formed part of the official Hungarian entry for the 1942 Venice Biennale and was subsequently awarded a prize. In his *Word and Image* István Nemeskürty identified it as the best expression of Hungarian cinematic artistry in the otherwise dreary wartime period. Nemeskürty's reading of the film has remained unchallenged. To this day *People on the Mountain* retains its reputation for the beauty of its imagery, simplicity of storytelling, and its sympathy for the downtrodden. Although the cinematography is truly remarkable, a reassessment of the film in virtually all other regards is overdue.

This article questions the case for *People on the Mountain*'s inclusion in the small group of films that anticipated neorealism and argues that its difference from the usual product of wartime Hungary has been greatly overstated. It seeks to demonstrate that the film is rooted in a radical nationalist discourse that promoted a concept of Hungarian identity that denied the presence of difference (ethnic, political, religious, etc.) within the geographical and political nation. It then goes on to argue that *People on the Mountain* remains inextricably linked to the anti-Semitic discourse

and practice of both the Hungarian film industry and the national government of its time. It is for this reason, in the context of the ongoing and wholesale re-appropriation of the period's cultural output, that the reassessment of this particular film has special significance. Scholarship on *People on the Mountain* has unduly privileged the auteur, or sought to dislocate the film from its narrow context by lifting it into a wider global setting, leaving irreconcilable contradictions. This article aims to demonstrate that a historically grounded textual analysis can enable a better understanding not just of the text, but also of its context. I therefore begin with a sketch of the Hungarian film industry at the time of the film's production, before assessing the film's critical reception and testing elements of that reception against a close reading of the film text.

The text and its context

The Hungarian film industry had developed rapidly in the early 1930s. Although the audience preferred foreign films and imports dominated the market, a number of Hungarian films, such as *Hyppolit a lakáj/Hyppolit the Butler* (Székely, 1932) and *Meseautó/Car of Dreams* (Gaál, 1934), nonetheless achieved substantial box office success. Buoyed by such successes, the Hungarian government resumed in the 1930s its protectionist film policy, which had been initiated in the previous decade, and boosted the domestic output by setting a ceiling for imports. By 1941 Hungarian films accounted for around a quarter of all releases,² and film industry bosses set the ambitious target of film self-sufficiency, or the ability of the domestic output to cater for all demand. The late 1930s saw the competitive film economy gradually drawn under complete state control. Although nominally privately owned and run for profit, the industry was heavily regulated; the treasury took the lion's share of the profits

through taxation on exhibition and levies raised from production businesses; and the sector had come to be devoted entirely to the promotion of the state's right-wing nationalist ideology.

People on the Mountain, an in-house production at Hunnia, the largest of the two quasi-state-owned film studios where all Hungarian films were shot in the period,³ premiered in Venice in autumn 1942 and was released in Hungary as one of the country's Biennale triumphs in January 1943. It was a general success and stayed on release throughout the year. After a five-week run in *Nemzeti Apollo*, it was still being shown in eight Budapest cinemas as late as November 1943.⁴

The film tells the story of a poor Transylvanian family. At the height of winter a baby is born to Gergő Csutak (János Görbe) and his wife Anna (Alice Szellay). Unable to convince a priest to make the arduous trek up the mountain to baptize the newborn, Gergő and his wife perform the baptism themselves, and christen the child, after his father, Gergő. In the spring the father performs another baptism: mixing pagan and Christian ritual in a way that was seen as typical of Hungarian culture, he carves the child's name into a tree. Gergő then introduces his son to the sacred places of the mountain. A shepherd makes young Gergő a gift of a sheep; another gives him a calf. Years pass and Gergő is old enough to take the cow to pasture. While he is away, and his father is at work, a venal official at the Arbor forestry company (the unnamed character is played by Oszkár Borovszky) stumbles across Anna as she washes clothes in a mountain stream. His passions are inflamed, and when he later meets Gergő, he makes him a proposal that cannot be refused: pay exorbitant back rent for his hut on Arbor land, or join the company as a woodcutter. Gergő accepts the job. The Arbor man ensures that Gergő is away for a few days on work, and in the night he tries to force himself on Anna. She resists and in her struggle she sets fire to

the cabin. Her assailant flees, and she takes to the mountain. Traumatized and caught in a blizzard, she falls down a ravine.

Gergő is told of the assault and he rejoins his family. He is desperate for revenge, but his wife has taken ill and needs help. They decide to seek divine intervention at a shrine to the Virgin a day's trek away. Anna has just enough strength to kneel at the shrine and pray for help, but is too weak to make the return trek. In the nearest city Gergő is told by a doctor that Anna cannot be saved, and indeed she dies. Her last wish is to be buried at home. Too poor to afford a hearse, Gergő takes her home by train. Although his fellow-passengers are not fooled by the pretence that she is alive, they take pity on Gergő and browbeat the conductor into not looking too closely at the limp body of the dead woman. As soon as she is buried Gergő hunts down and murders the Arbor man. He is caught and sentenced to ten years hard labour. The people of the mountain arrive too late to testify in his favour. At Christmas Gergő escapes, but he is shot. He succeeds in evading the gendarmes long enough to tell his friend to collect the blood money on his head and use it to buy a pair of sturdy boots for young Gergő. The film ends with the people of the mountain mourning their friend and celebrating Christmas in their own half-pagan way.

The text and criticism

Nemeskürty was the first to draw attention to the qualities of *People on the Mountain*. In his *Word and Image*, the first comprehensive history of Hungarian film and, until Burns's *World Cinema: Hungary* (1996), the only one published in English, Nemeskürty declares that '*People on the Alps* is the most outstanding Hungarian film made before the Liberation'.⁵ He consistently calls the film *People on the Alps* and to this day the Hungarian film institute MaNDA refers to the film as *Men in the Alps* in

English in its online catalogue,⁶ despite it being explicitly located in the Transylvanian Carpathians. *Word and Image* was sanctioned by the Hungarian communist party and Nemeskürty's account reflects the regime's narrative of a post-war new beginning rooted in inter-war and wartime communist revolutionary activism.

Nemeskürty begins his analysis by reprinting a paragraph from the film's review in the Italian *Cinema* magazine: 'Let the song of the Alps, the song sounded for the first time by István Szóts, finally penetrate our own studios and chase away the senile notables, the traders and profiteers'.⁷ For the reviewer,⁸ as for Nemeskürty, the film represents a breath of fresh air in the stilted European filmmaking culture. That the Italian reviewer, writing in the premier film journal of Fascist Italy should have relocated the film to the Alps, a mountain range stretching from western Hungary through southern Germany and northern Italy to the southern borders of occupied France, is less remarkable than Nemeskürty's dislocation of the film from Transylvania. This dislocation (in renaming it *People on the Alps*) is part of an attempt at claiming for the film a transnational (as opposed to nationalist) pedigree it did not have.

Nemeskürty claims the film has special significance as a precursor of the post-war mode of filmmaking. Thus he picks out for praise the scene of Anna's burial, calling it 'modern, even in a 1974 sense, but in 1942 it was too unusual and too far ahead of its time'.⁹ He attributes to the film a 'simplicity and extreme directness' that is hard to justify,¹⁰ and roots these in the Soviet filmmaking tradition, citing the influence of early socialist realist works of the 1930s, such as Nikolai Ekk's *Putevka v zhizn'*/*Road to Life* (1931). For Nemeskürty, the film's story dealing with a poor woodcutter's failure to resist exploitation by a rapacious corporation is a romantic

anti-capitalist narrative. In his reading the film acquires a left-wing pedigree, but he warns that the romantic note is jarring and undermines the anti-capitalist message. He concludes his remarks by giving an account of Szóts' difficulties in getting a follow-up project off the ground in order to justify his claim that Szóts lost favour with the regime after the film's release. This claim, too, is wide of the mark, as we shall see. Finally he declares that '*People on the Alps* was not a fruit of war-time film production; it came rather as a defiance', and asserts that 'this mode of formulating a romantic revolt against oppression was the maximum that Hungarian films were capable of before the year of the Liberation'.¹¹

Nemeskürty's tendentious reading has been taken at face value by most critics and it echoes through virtually all subsequent academic writing on *People on the Mountain*. In their *Eastern European Film after 1945* Mira and Antonín Liehm cite the same *Cinema* review, before praising the film's simplicity and directness and its 'social message, borne by the attempt to achieve sheer realism', which 'mingles here with a romantic pantheistic love of nature'.¹² In conclusion, they suggest that the film was badly received in official quarters and that, even as the film was being awarded a prize at the Venice festival, Szóts was being denied permission to shoot his next film.¹³

In *World Cinema: Hungary*, Bryan Burns recaps Nemeskürty's reading before picking out the film's focus on nature. Despite the film's inescapable religiosity, Burns, bizarrely, attributes an 'anti-religious tinge' to its message that 'in the end nature will prevail, and that the soul of Hungary is rooted in the land and not the town'.¹⁴ He hails the powerful performances of Görbe and Szellay, which he suggests eschew melodrama, and praises the beauty and profundity of Ferenc Fekete's cinematography. Burns rightly identifies the film's reactionary pastoralism, but his

final judgement that the film 'is a plea to Hungarians to consider the future of their society before it is too late, conducted without artfulness or rhetoric, and giving instead an extraordinary impression of authenticity' is fanciful and difficult to back with evidence from the text.¹⁵

More recently, Adam Bingham has described the film somewhat cryptically as Sjöström-esque, but otherwise falls in line with Nemeskürty's assessment. He repeats often-made false claims when he writes: 'Szóts's debut has in fact been hailed by some as a precursor to Italian neorealism, but it was not wholly successful in Hungary and proved an exception rather than a rule'.¹⁶ In his chapter on the uneasy relationship between the film industries of Hungary and Germany during the war years, David Frey cites the Venice festival jury's recognition of *People on the Mountain* as evidence of Hungary's 'regained cultural and political clout in Central Europe'.¹⁷ This may be true as far as it goes, but does little to address the more important questions of the film's domestic reception and canonical status.

It is John Cunningham who has written most and most sophisticatedly about *People on the Mountain* in English, beginning with his book *Hungarian Cinema*.¹⁸ He also follows the Nemeskürty line and notes that in an 'atmosphere of cultural sterilisation, repression and monochrome nationalism, it is surprising, indeed remarkable, that one of Hungary's most groundbreaking, respected and heralded films was made'.¹⁹ He then argues that the film 'worked against the grain of Hungarian film-making',²⁰ and that its success in Venice was a testament to the quality of the film in the year when the festival was most overtly politicized. He echoes Nemeskürty's account of the film's unfavourable domestic reception, and notes that the fact that the film was made is remarkable in itself, given that it offers an unflinchingly honest portrayal of Transylvania: 'having struggled to win back

Transylvania, the Hungarian government could not have been too pleased with a film that portrayed their heartland as a repository of Dickensian labour conditions, poverty and exploitation'.²¹

Cunningham's chapter in *The Cinema of Central Europe*, however, represents the only notable departure from the Nemeskürty reading.²² In this extended analysis of the film Cunningham cites Haudiquet's comparison of Szőts to Dovzhenko, Ford and Renoir, which lifts the film from its narrow national context into the transnational realm of European art cinema. He refers to Jeancolas' reading of Szőts's style as evoking the lyrical realism of Jean Vigo, which reinforces this relocation of the film outside of the Hungarian context. With the same effect, he also once again quotes the review published in September 1942 in *Cinema*.²³ Cunningham goes against Nemeskürty in another way: he downplays the film's difference from the usual output of Hungary's wartime industry. Where in *Hungarian Cinema* he took at face value Nemeskürty's claim that the film constituted a defiance and speculated that it may have been given the green light as an oversight or because it was a pet project of Hunnia boss János Bingert,²⁴ here he argues that the project followed logically Hungary's reoccupation of some of Transylvania. He notes that the film 'appeared at a particular and crucial time in Hungarian history, [and was] filmed in an area considered by many to be the heart of a resurrected and reunified Motherland'.²⁵

Despite these important concessions, Cunningham restates his claim from *Hungarian Cinema* that it is to the film's credit that 'Goebbels refused it a distribution licence'.²⁶ The fact is that Germany had boycotted Hungarian films for the continued participation of Jewish filmmakers in the industry throughout the 1930s and did not consider the Hungarian film sector free of Jewish influence until the implementation of the third anti-Jewish law of 1941.²⁷ Cunningham goes on to link the film to the

Hungarian 'Third Way', a movement that sought to distance Hungary from the Nazi as well as the Bolshevik model.²⁸ In a return to the tone of *Hungarian Cinema*, he then praises the film for its unflinching representation of the poverty and exploitation of the people of Transylvania, but admits that the film's representation of what was, in fact, an ethnically diverse region as homogenously Hungarian is problematic.²⁹ In fact this is particularly troubling, since both the writer József Nyírő and the director Szóts were Transylvanian and well aware of the region's ethnic diversity. On the whole, Cunningham remains positive in his assessment of the film. Sandwiched between an introduction and a conclusion that acknowledge the film's historical and political context is a fundamentally celebratory piece that privileges the auteur, distances the film from its context of production, and commends its many qualities. At various points Cunningham praises the film's (and by extension the filmmaker's) 'decency' and 'humanity', its 'lyrical beauty' and 'firm sense of place, environment and culture', and declares it, anachronistically, the first 'Green film'.³⁰ This final outlandish suggestion is indicative of attempts to attribute the film's romanticization of nature to anything other than nationalism and a filmic expression of a territorial claim to Transylvania.

It is true that the film offers many scenes that seem to validate the critics' praise. The opening sequence in which Gergő and Anna huddle together in terror that the freezing cold may claim their newborn before he is christened is powerful, indeed. The cold is conveyed with simplicity through Hunnia chief engineer Ferenc Lohr's soundtrack of wind and wolves howling in unison, while the dimly lit cottage interior seems to close in around the Csutak family. But this scene was certainly studio shot, and uses post-synchronized sound. It may be effective, but this does not result from location shooting or a departure from the usual methods applied at Hunnia. The

sequence showing the woodcutters at work after Gergő has taken the job at Arbor effectively mixes documentary footage with exterior scenes that make excellent use of the dramatic location in the Carpathians. It is no surprise that Nemeskürty and Haudiquet were reminded of the Soviet cinema of the 1930s by these striking shots of men at work in freezing conditions, but it must be noted that location shooting or the use of documentary or found footage in fiction films was not uncommon.³¹

The sequence of the Csutak family making their gruelling trek across the mountains to the shrine of the Virgin has been unsurprisingly singled out for praise by virtually all who have written about the film. The landscape takes centre stage here. It transcends mere terrain to be crossed or simple background. It has a painterly quality that evokes the distant mountains of renaissance depictions of the Virgin, providing both physical and spiritual depth. The procession and Mass that follow effectively evoke the heady atmosphere of deeply felt religious experience, while showing a remarkable but probably coincidental similarity with the procession for rain in Eisenstein's *Staroe i novoe/The Old and the New* (1929).

The extensive location shooting, the resultant strong sense of place, the use of little known actors in the central roles, and the simplicity and humanity of the storytelling combine to draw the critic towards the tempting conclusion that the film anticipated or perhaps inspired the neorealist movement. The film's much-discussed success at Venice also points to this conclusion. While there may be some truth in Cunningham's scenario of Carlo Lizzani cherishing his memory of a once-seen Hungarian film from the 1942 Biennale, the kinship between neorealism and *People on the Mountain* is certainly overstated.

A more appropriate set of similarities is found between Roberto Rossellini and Szőts. Both made their first films under a radical nationalist regime. Both found

success during the war with films about Christian suffering, and both followed wartime melodramas with post-war dramas about suffering and the endurance of the human spirit. Rossellini followed *Uomo dalla croce/Man on the Cross* (1942), about the martyrdom of a priest at the hands of godless Bolsheviks, with *Roma, città aperta/Rome, Open City* (1945), about the martyrdom of a priest at the hands of evil Germans. Similarly, Szőts followed *People on the Mountain*, about the destruction of a family unit under the evil influence of rapacious foreigners, with *Song of the Cornfields* (1947), a film about the destruction of a small family unit under extreme hardships caused by the recent war. Both preserved their reputation in the post-war period for films of great artistry and humanity, despite regime-friendly contributions to their respective wartime cinemas.

Just as tempting and overstated as the similarity with neorealism is the argument that claims to identify the influence of 1930s Soviet film on Szőts. If it is unlikely that Lizzani's experience of *People on the Mountain* had any effect on Giuseppe de Santis or Roberto Rossellini, it is even more unlikely that Szőts would have been exposed to much Soviet cinema in his teens in the staunchly anti-Bolshevik inter-war Hungary, where Soviet films were proscribed by the censors, or in the similarly anti-Communist Romania.

The text in its context

As previously noted, the Hungarian film industry was subject to strict state control, particularly in the period that followed the enactment of Hungary's anti-Semitic laws from 1938 onwards. This had a crucial impact on the way in which projects were selected and approved for development. For this reason, any account of film

production in wartime Hungary must address the issue of the expulsion of Jewish Hungarians from the industry.³²

Jewish Hungarians were effectively banned from the film sector by Acts 1938.XV. and 1939.IV., commonly known as *zsidótörvények* or ‘Jewish laws’ at the time (troublingly, they continue to be referred to as such in Hungary). Under these laws all industry personnel were bound by law to seek admission to a newly created Chamber of Film and Dramatic Arts. The chamber had been set up as a democratically organized representative body of Hungarian film practitioners in the middle of the 1930s. Under the provisions of the first anti-Jewish law it became a quasi-governmental organization headed by figures elected from the newly purged industry. The chamber was overseen on behalf of the government by a secretary of state. Act XV of 1938 limited the number of Jewish Hungarians in the industry to 20 per cent of all Film Chamber members, but banned Jewish Hungarians outright from all above-the-line positions, except for scriptwriting. The second anti-Jewish Act cut this ceiling to 6 per cent, the putative proportion of Jewish Hungarians in the overall population of the country. The actual maximum permitted number of Jewish Hungarians in the industry was reduced further by the proviso that no new Jewish Hungarian members could be admitted until their proportion continued to exceed 6 per cent in any of the main categories (actors; technicians; extras; etc.).

With some films taking longer than others to make the journey from script to can to theatre, Jewish Hungarians disappeared from meaningful roles on and off screen by the end of 1940 and disappeared altogether after the third anti-Jewish law of 1941 (Act 1941.XV.), which saw the expulsion of such grandees of the Hungarian stage and screen as Kálmán Rózsahegyi, teacher to generations of Hungarian actors, and Gyula Gózon, a popular comic actor with an ability to bring deeply felt emotion

to the flimsiest of roles. A very small number of Jewish Hungarian scriptwriters continued to work under pseudonyms. The implementation of the anti-Jewish laws, dubbed *őrségváltás* (the changing of the guard) or *átállítás* (adjustment), had a profound impact on the industry. Men and women of experience and expertise in production, distribution and exhibition were excluded from the profession and left behind a raft of positions to be filled at short notice.³³ The architects of the expulsion of Jewish Hungarians from the industry saw this as the inevitable but temporary downside of the necessary restructuring of the sector in what they called a Christian-national spirit. Training programmes were established for scriptwriters and cinema operators, and the state-run Academy of Dramatic and Film Arts expanded its courses to train a new generation of film and theatre professionals. It is under these circumstances that a host of young filmmakers were given the chance to try their hands at directing. Among them were Viktor Bánky, Félix Podmaniczky, Ákos D. Hamza, Arzén and László Cserépy, Zoltán Farkas and István Szóts.³⁴ It is clear: claims that *People on the Mountain* was given the go-ahead despite the youth of its director or that Szóts's searing natural talent had won him the right to direct overlook the fact that Szóts, a thirty year-old aspiring director with just one documentary short to his name, was simply one of many young men and women who to a great degree owed their early rise to prominence to the expulsion of Jewish Hungarians from the industry.

Resulting from a similar failure to place the text in its proper context is the suggestion that the film was in any way an exception to the norm. Like 25 films out of 41 in the 1941–1942 shooting calendar, it was filmed at the state-controlled Hunnia studios. There was no going against the grain of Hungarian filmmaking here. Hunnia boss János Bingert, who took a producer credit on the film, was one of the architects

of the anti-Jewish purge and one of its chief beneficiaries. Where prior to 1938 alternative funding and studio facilities could conceivably be secured for productions that Bingert refused to green-light at Hunnia, after the first anti-Jewish act, which also outlawed Jewish participation in film financing, severely limiting the involvement of venture capital in the film business, no film could be made without having to secure Bingert's approval. He was one of the executives of the Film Chamber, giving him the power to expel, or at least initiate the expulsion of members, and sat on the committee that met at the beginning of each 'film year' in March to determine which scripts would be approved for shooting, and how much time they would be allocated in one of the two state-owned production facilities over the next twelve months. This also gave him the right to override the censorship committee of civil servants, army chiefs, churchmen and film industry representatives that vetted all proposed scripts.³⁵

Just as unexceptional as the pre-production process was the decision to adapt Nyíró's short stories about life in the Transylvanian mountains. As Cunningham notes, the reoccupation of about half of the Transylvanian territories that had been under Hungarian control at the time of the outbreak of World War 1 made it a topical choice.³⁶ But it is just as likely that another consideration was at work: one of Nyíró's novels set among the people of the Transylvanian mountains had been a major success for Bingert and Hunnia in 1938. *Uz Bence* (dir. Jenő Csepreghy) was originally released in November 1938 and was awarded the rather awkward title of 'the most Hungarian film of propaganda value' at the 1939 film week, a state-sponsored festival of the output of the 'new' Hungarian film industry. The director was even presented with a special award for most wins by a film.³⁷ Following its critical success, the first run theatre *Scala* in Budapest put the film back on its

programme in August 1939.³⁸ The success of *Uz Bence* was almost certainly a major factor in paving the way for *People on the Mountain*.

Nyíró was hired to develop the script with Szóts and the film's publicity campaign focused on the author and stressed the prominent role in the film of the Transylvanian landscape. In a 1942 interview Nyíró said: 'right now I am most interested in the film I made with István Szóts in Transylvania ... We wrote the script together, and 70 per cent of the film consists of exterior shots. The Red Lake, the snow-covered peaks of Háromszék are the protagonists of the film'. Nyíró added: 'I believe this will be a pioneering work in Hungarian cinema'.³⁹ This claim of uniqueness and of a predominance of exterior shots has been repeated by virtually every critic, from Nemeskürty in 1974 to Bingham in 2011.

However, Nyíró's claim is exaggerated. The film is not as unusual as has been suggested. It is far from being the first predominantly location-shot film, or even the first film to make effective use of a mixture of documentary footage with new material. Made nearly ten years earlier, *Íté a Balaton/The Storm* (Pál Fejős, 1932) featured many location-shot sequences, including documentary footage of an authentic village fair, fishermen working the nets, villagers harvesting grapes, and a harvest feast. By no means was this a trend that failed to take off. In fact, location shooting was fairly typical of the industry and the virtues of effective exterior shots were frequently discussed in the popular and trade press. This may have been partly due to the fact that studio time and space was at a premium and a virtue was made out of a necessity. In using exterior shots to good effect *People on the Mountain* did no more than follow a major national trend and should be seen as one of a line of Hungarian films that include *Tavaszi zápor/Spring downpour* (Fejős, 1933), *Nem élhetek muzsikaszó nélkül/I Cannot Live without Music* (Alfréd Deéry, 1935), *Sárga*

csikó/Yellow Pony (István György, 1936), *Uz Bence, Pusztai királykisasszony/Princess of the Puszta* (Csepreghy, 1938), *Isten tenyerén/In the Palm of God* (Klára Riedl, 1939) and *Földindulás/Landslide* (Arzén von Cserépy, 1939).

Anyone who has taken the time to look at the cast list would be surprised to learn that *People on the Mountain* should enjoy the reputation of an atypical or oppositional film. Although Szellay was a newcomer to cinema and locals were used in some scenes (if Nyíró's account is accurate),⁴⁰ the two leads were established theatre actors, and Görbe had already worked on five films, despite making his debut a little over a year before shooting began. The rest of the cast were veteran actors. József Bihari who played the elder of the mountain community had already appeared in 26 films. Lajos Gárdai, appearing as one of Gergő's fellow mountain men, was a veteran of 32 films. Film Chamber admissions committee member Imre Toronyi, who played the medical professor who delivers the tragic diagnosis of Anna's condition, had 21 previous credits. National Theatre veteran György Kürthy, cast in the role of the judge who condemns Gergő, had 31 credits. These were all long-established actors in senior positions within the Film Chamber playing men of substance and authority. There was nothing oppositional about the casting and any suggestion that *People on the Mountain* relied substantially on non-professional actors is wildly inaccurate.

The last commonly made claim that must be challenged before we move on to consider the film in relation to the nationalist discourse of its time is that it was badly received in Hungary, a claim made by Nemeskürty, the Liehms, Burns, Bingham, and Cunningham. This consistent error may be the result of a failure to acknowledge the typically vitriolic tone of Hungarian film criticism, particularly in the radical press. To take just one example, a reprinted article on Hungarian film in the period 1931–1941 by the radical nationalist commentator Lajos Pálóczy-Horváth, originally published in

Magyar Élet, declares the entire corpus of the decade to have been an affront against Hungarian values.⁴¹ Pálóczy-Horváth notes that only two films deserve praise: *Hortobágy* (Höllering, 1936) and *Landslide*. The former was a Swiss-Hungarian folxploitation film recently re-released on DVD by the Hungarian film institute,⁴² the latter an abortion drama by the nationalist János Kodolányi, adapted for the screen by the anti-Semitic campaigner György Patkós. The strength of journalists' antipathy for Hungarian films can be explained by the perception that the film industry attracted ideologically unreliable people and was a dangerous breeding ground for liberal and leftist ideas. Indeed, such was the ferocity of the criticism formulated by the popular press towards most Hungarian films that a lengthy and very public dispute broke out between industry personnel and journalists at a press junket after Kárpát Film boss István Erdélyi called for friendlier reviews.⁴³ The dispute was the subject of a series of articles in *Magyar Film* between March and June 1942, indicating the depth of feeling on both sides, and there were calls to raise the issue with the *Internationale Filmkammer*, the Axis-backed European film organization, later in the year.⁴⁴ Any contemporary criticism of a Hungarian film must therefore be read with this antagonism between filmmakers and journalists in mind.

A more faithful indicator of the film's reception is the glowing review by Géza Matolay.⁴⁵ As editor of the only officially approved trade paper – a sort of state-backed *Variety* – Matolay's judgement can be read as an articulation of the official state response to the film. He praises the film for its faithful interpretation of Nyírő's novel, the harmony of film style and literary source material, and the film's innovative 'mode of expression and ... tools of representation'. He has high praise too for the cinematography: Fekete's 'artistry' is crucial to the 'fitting interpretation of Nyírő's message'. Matolay concludes by noting that the film's Hungarian premiere

began with a speech by Parliamentary under-secretary baron Gyula Wlassics and the audience, 'which included minister for industry and trade József Varga, farming minister baron Dániel Bánffy and secretary of the prime minister's office Ferenc Zsindely, as well as many prominent figures from public life, gave a warm ovation to József Nyírő, István Szóts and his crew and the cast of the film'. The film's special status is further evidenced by the beautifully made invitation to its premiere, hand painted on a wafer thin sheet of wood bark, which I found while conducting research at the Hungarian film institute. The invite had been slipped between the pages of a copy of the shooting script, where it remains.

Despite such an obviously warm reception, Cunningham has speculated that the film's Venice triumph was in spite of the hostility of the regime.⁴⁶ In fact, *People on the Mountain* was chosen to represent Hungary at the Biennale after much careful consideration, with weekly updates on rumoured front runners in *Magyar Film* throughout the summer of 1942. In the editorial that announced the films picked for the festival by a state-appointed committee headed by Gyula Wlassics, *People on the Mountain* is described as 'a Hungarian film of quite extraordinary flavour' and perfect imagery.⁴⁷ To argue that the film won a prize in Venice despite it being the year when the festival 'was most narrowly conceived and closely aligned with the fascist powers and their satellites' seems an extraordinary twist of logic,⁴⁸ when the readily available explanation is simply that *People on the Mountain* was a film that met with the complete approval of the then dominant radical right, both on the domestic scene and in the broader context of Axis Europe. This is certainly supported by the award for 'most artistic Hungarian film of the 1941/42 and 1942/43 seasons' presented in late 1943 by the Hungarian government to the Hunnia board,⁴⁹ at precisely the time when Szóts was supposed to be out of favour.⁵⁰

The film and nationalism

If the differences between *People on the Mountain* from the run of the mill Hungarian production of the time has been greatly overstated, the extent to which the film is rooted in a radical nationalist discourse has been ignored in equal measure. If we look beyond Nemeskürty's reading, we will see how from the very first frame *People on the Mountain* makes use of an unmistakably nationalist discourse. The film's opening credits are carved into a *kopjafa*, a decorated wooden post, roughly the height of an average person. Used as a head post or memorial, it gave the title to Nyírő's collection of short stories. A *kopjafa*, by virtue of its function as a marker of the plot of land in which predecessors lie, operates as a symbol of Hungarian presence rooted in the soil. This reference to a primordial presence in the Carpathian was a key element of Hungarian claims to Transylvania before and after the Trianon Treaty of 1920. Given a privileged position in the film text, in the very opening sequence, the head post marks the Transylvanian Carpathians as a land that is Hungarian by virtue of the presence of Hungarian ancestors in its soil. Already in the opening frames the film has tapped into a nationalist discourse that claims for Hungarians precedence and primacy in the ethnically diverse Transylvania.

Christianity inflected by a certain nature-oriented paganism, a distinguishing feature of many Hungarian radical nationalist ideologies, such as the Turáni movement,⁵¹ permeates both the film and its characters. This is unmistakable in the film's opening voiceover, which describes the simple mountain folk as beloved by God, although rarely seen in church, able to speak the tongue of animals and with the love of God and fear of hell shining in their eyes. The unequivocally celebratory voiceover suggests a sort of instinctive faith: an unlearned and therefore artless and

innate knowledge of Christianity mingles here with a magical-mystical oneness with nature. This is reaffirmed in the scene where Anna and Gergő introduce their son to the mountain. As they pass through a series of idyllic mountain spots, Gergő passes on his knowledge to the barely two-month old Gergő. His voice, laden with humility and piety, reaches us via heavily engineered post-synchronized sound. The effect is that of the echoing whispers of the awe-struck visitor in an immense cathedral. The low-angle shots dramatically frame the characters in relation to the sky and the peaks. Combined with the overtly religious tone, this invests the mountain with a sense of sanctity. And indeed, as they cross a mountain clearing with sunbeams bursting through the trees around it Gergő whispers: ‘this is our temple, we must be quiet here’. Rather than a ‘pantheistic love of nature’,⁵² the film’s interlinking of spiritual ecstasy with nature works to fetishize the Transylvanian landscape as hallowed ground and the cradle of true Hungarianness. Thus a territorial claim to Transylvania masquerades in *People on the Mountain* as a yearning for the union of humanity with nature.

It is truly remarkable that *People on the Mountain* should enjoy the reputation of a film of great simplicity. It is, after all, an overblown melodrama, a story of violence, the death of a sexually assaulted woman, the violent death of the rapist, and eventually of the husband, and the ultimate orphaning of young Gergő, representative of a new generation born into a Transylvania under threat by foreign forces. This story is told with baroque imagery redolent with heavy religious symbolism. There are sunbeams breaking through the clouds and tall trees shooting up to the sky to form an organic latticework that evokes the delicately ornamented ceilings of Gothic cathedrals. Neither the story, nor its realization can be said to be simple. Rather, the simplicity which the film claims for itself is the putative simplicity of the way of life

of the people of the mountain, which the film celebrates as a great virtue. This is another way in which subsequent commentators have misread the discourse surrounding the film. Just as typically vitriolic criticism was no proof of the state's displeasure, the insistence on simplicity is not about simplicity of storytelling or representation, but about the idealization of the 'simple' way of life of the people of the mountain.

The death of the mother, which the film does not attribute to any specific illness, but instead represents as the spontaneous self-destruction of the maternal body contaminated by its rape by a foreign body, can be linked to the discourse of eugenics. The idea of the automatic rejection of impurity by the national body is echoed in the narrative of this spontaneous self-destruction of a woman's body that had been raped by a foreigner.⁵³ As Marius Turda and Paul Weindling have shown in their introduction to *Blood and Homeland*, the new science of eugenics was embraced with enthusiasm by a group of Hungarian biologists, doctors and political thinkers in the early twentieth century. The vocabulary of eugenics made its way into the mainstream political discourse of the time and informed many of the major debates.⁵⁴ The story of a family's destruction as a result of the rape of the woman and the exploitation of the man by a rapacious foreign capitalist (almost always code for 'Jew' in the Hungarian context) is reflective of Hungarian nightmare visions of *nemzethalál* or death of the nation.⁵⁵ From the middle of the nineteenth century this fear, rooted in eighteenth-century political debates on the future of Hungary within the Habsburg Empire, featured heavily in Hungarian political discourse.⁵⁶ Various self-appointed Cassandras pointed to a declining Hungarian population and warned of the rapid growth of various minorities, especially of Jewish immigrants and Romanians, the two groups seen as most harmful to the health of the nation.⁵⁷ By the inter-war period the

discourse of eugenics had intermingled with extreme nationalist and anti-Semitic ideologies, particularly in the works of Lajos Méhely, and concerns for the health of the nation, the purity of the bloodline, and maternal health became closely interlinked.⁵⁸ Thinking with Susan Hayward and her programmatic essay on cinema and nation,⁵⁹ the spontaneous death of the violated mother is best understood in the context of national fears about the declining population, the corruption of the bloodline and the broad acceptance of eugenics as a force for good across the political spectrum in early 20th century Hungary.

The final issue that has been mistaken for a distinguishing feature of *People on the Mountain* is the film's unflinching portrayal of the poverty of the people of the mountain. It is true, as Cunningham suggests, that the film foregrounds the harsh conditions of life in the mountains and does not shy away from a 'vivid portrayal of rural poverty, exploitation, [and] the lack of compassion shown by urban society'.⁶⁰ This brutal honesty in representing social problems was typical of the Hungarian problem film, usually made by committed radical right-wing ideologues, such as Viktor Bánky and Arzén Cserépy, and which can be most closely aligned with the *Tendenzfilm* of the Nazi film industry. Notable examples are the already mentioned *Landslide* and *Spring Downpour*, as well as *Dr. Kovács István* (Bánky, 1941), about the obstacles that must be overcome in order to ensure that Hungarian youth has access to the right kind of education; *Őrségváltás* (Bánky, 1942), about the struggle to overcome the resistance of Jewish capitalist interest groups to their own expropriation; and the abortion/fertility dramas *És a vakok látnak/And the Blind Open their Eyes* (Imre Jenei, 1943), *A harmincadik/The Thirtieth* (László Cserépy, 1942) and *Az első/The First* (István Apáthy, 1944).

Of the above, *Landslide* is the most relevant to the present discussion. Released two years before *People on the Mountain*, it was the first problem film of the newly purged industry and one of the few films to have met with the complete approval of the radical press.⁶¹ The central character of *Landslide* is a young man whose ambitions of a productive life are kept in check by a selfish older generation. Fearing the gradual breakup of the family holding – a familiar trope in post-Trianon Hungary – the young man's mother-in-law engages an old crone to abort her daughter's second pregnancy. The abortion is successful, but renders the woman barren, which pushes the man into alcoholism and violence.

Landslide opens with a scrolling introduction, which would be echoed by *People on the Mountain* two years later. The introduction reaches for pathos with the admonition:

See how young life is nipped in the bud, and see how the soul bends
under the weight of the hand of God, admits its sins and springs to life
anew. Behold yourselves, Hungarians, inheritors of this blessed land.
Protect it, fight, live and love. Trust the rest to God.

Landslide is thus introduced with a call to fight for the restoration of Hungarian territorial integrity in the name of God. *People on the Mountain*, however, made in the euphoric aftermath of the re-annexation of much of Transylvania, does not openly call Hungarians to arms. But it does share *Landslide*'s use of an oppressively religious rhetoric to offer the image of a chosen people living by the grace of God in a promised land.

Like *People on the Mountain* two years later, *Landslide* was released with all the pomp and circumstance of a prestige production. Its premiere in Royal Apollo was attended by Miklós Horthy himself,⁶² accompanied by his wife, by the cabinet secretary István Uray, minister of defence Károly Bartha, first aide-de-camp general Lajos Keresztes Fischer and propaganda minister István Antal. Just as *Landslide* had been celebrated as a film of unflinching honesty, great propaganda value and representative of the ideal Christian-national spirit, so too *People on the Mountain* was received with the same enthusiasm. Far from failing to toe the official line or incurring the displeasure of the government for portraying Transylvania as a 'repository of Dickensian labour conditions',⁶³ *People on the Mountain*, as we have seen, was a warmly received film that wholeheartedly embraced the era's radical nationalist tendency towards a tone of brutal self-criticism.

The context and significance of this reassessment

In the face of such varied and weighty evidence, the question inevitably arises: why has the film been so consistently misrepresented? The answer lies in the post-war settlement. Because the communists, preparing to seize power, were as convinced as the Horthy regime had been of the importance of cinema in educating and controlling the population, they were willing to overlook a great many past sins in order to ensure that those who could prove useful would not be needlessly excluded. As a result of this cynically pragmatic approach to the post-war vetting of the industry, as in virtually all other walks of life, the confrontation with the crimes of the past regime simply did not take place. As a result there was a remarkable degree of continuity between the wartime and post-war industries. True, a small number of the most extremist industry figures had fled to the west, but the vast majority of those who

stayed found it remarkably easy to carry on as before.⁶⁴ Among those who stayed were Film Chamber deputy chairman and notorious pro-Nazi Béla Mihályffy, another deputy chairman, Tivadar Uray, Horthy-era poster boy Gyula Benkő and poster girls Éva Szörényi and Klári Tolnay. Morally compromised figures were whitewashed and welcomed into the newly formed Free Trade Union of Actors, the communist counterpart of the Film Chamber. While many Jewish Hungarian actors and practitioners had been left jobless and penniless in 1938, in 1945 those who had expelled them from the industry, and those who had benefited from their expulsion, were given a free pass.

For want of a true break with the wartime tradition, a narrative was constructed that placed the roots of the post-war filmmaking ethos in an (imagined) oppositional mode pre-existent in the wartime period. This need to build on pre-existing structures and to assert continuity can be seen in other aspects of the Reconstruction period, perhaps most acutely in Mátyás Rákosi's cynical advice to Communist recruiters to avoid sending out activists who looked too Jewish,⁶⁵ and to target former Arrow Cross men as they were easy to convert to the Communist cause.⁶⁶ It is also this real and imagined continuity – which connected the post-war moment with the wartime era across a discursive denial of that continuity – that can be apprehended in Nemeskürty's paradoxical assertion that the best of Hungary's wartime cinema were now practising a new filmmaking mode. It is for this reason that he singles out for praise a small number of Horthy-era directors, such as Szőts and Géza Radványi, and goes to great lengths to recast them as opponents of the regime whose films represent a sort of defiance. A break and a continuity are thus simultaneously asserted, giving Hungarian film scholarship its fundamentally misleading spin, whereby it is both tiny and world famous, successful and overlooked,

old and new. It is thus that in Nemeskürty's telling, and in all subsequent works on Hungarian film, the devoutly religious Szóts, whose Christian-national pedigree cannot be contested, became an opponent of the Horthy regime. *Somewhere in Europe* (1947), directed by Radványi, whose stint in *Cinecittá* during the war was much boasted about in *Magyar Film*,⁶⁷ became in the same manner an exiled enemy of the regime.⁶⁸ Nemeskürty's mistranslation of *People on the Mountain* as *People of the Alps*, moving the story from contested Transylvania, a taboo subject at the time of writing, to the then neutral territory of the Alps, is part of this wishful (over)writing of history. Relocated to the Alps, the film could be more credibly presented as a universal (or at least European) tale of endurance and humanity. It is therefore Nemeskürty's misleading account – and the temptation is great to call it quite simply a lie – that has gone on to distort subsequent criticisms of the film, the root cause of Cunningham tying himself in knots speculating about Goebbels's personal dislike for *People on the Mountain*.

Although the transition to democracy in 1989 has meant that the films of the Horthy regime could be studied without the compulsion to toe the party line, the communists' misrepresentation of Hungary's wartime industry has remained largely unchallenged. Many of the claims shown to be without basis in this article were repeated at a recent Budapest conference to mark Szóts's centenary. László Deák Sárosi's paper celebrated the film's innovative use of location shooting. In his abstract Attila Benke repeated the claim that the film was criticized at the time of its release for being too 'leftist'. Karolina Szin's abstract praises Szóts for his ability to render the deeply felt faith of the common man with unparalleled honesty. Only Györgyi Vajdovich sought to place *People on the Mountain* within the wartime tradition of *népi* or rural films, but even Vajdovich's abstract repeats the claim that the film was

not well received.⁶⁹ These claims feed from a continued refusal to place Szóts and his film within their proper context, favouring instead an analysis that emphasizes Szóts's special standing and the significance of the auteur in ensuring a film's difference from the run of the mill.

It is perhaps understandable that there is little desire to begin to undertake the reassessment of the cultural output of the Horthy era. Such an exercise threatens to leave Hungary without much of a canon to celebrate or emulate. We must however resist the temptation to let sleeping dogs lie. The reassessment of the cultural output of the Horthy era by necessity entails a confrontation with Hungary's nationalistic discourse of the 1930s and the war years, but also with its communist past, for the canon is built on misrepresentation by a communist regime seeking to root itself in a fanciful version of Hungarian history. The fragmentation of the canon may be a heavy price to pay, but the reassessment cannot be delayed any longer, especially in light of the reprise of radical nationalistic discourses in twenty-first-century Hungary.

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² By the 1941/42 season Hungarian films accounted for 24 per cent of a total 154 distributed in the twelve months to March: *Magyar Film*, 32 (1942), p. 10.

³ Hunnia was a relatively well-equipped production facility where 25 films out of a national output of 41 were shot in the 1941/42 season: *Magyar Film*, 14 (1942), p. 3.

⁴ *Magyar Film*, 44 (1943), p. 11.

⁵ István Nemeskürty, *Word and Image: History of the Hungarian Cinema* (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1974), p. 137.

⁶ <http://www.filmobserver.hu/filmintezet/search.php?id=80000432>

⁷ Nemeskürty, *Word and Image*, p. 132.

⁸ In his chapter in *The Cinema of Central Europe*, Cunningham speculates that the editorial, signed 'L.', was likely written by the future neorealist Carlo Lizzani. John Cunningham, 'People on the Mountain', in Peter Hames (ed.), *The Cinema of Central Europe* (London: Wallflower, 2004), p. 40.

⁹ Nemeskürty, *Word and Image*, p. 135.

¹⁰ Nemeskürty, *Word and Image*, p. 136.

¹¹ Nemeskürty, *Word and Image*, p. 137.

¹² Mira Liehm and Antonín J. Liehm, *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Film after 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 33.

¹³ Liehm and Liehm, *The Most Important Art*, p. 33.

¹⁴ Bryan Burns, *World Cinema: Hungary* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), p. 17.

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- ¹⁵ Burns, *World Cinema: Hungary*, p. 17.
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- ¹⁸ John Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema: from Coffee House to Multiplex* (London: Wallflower, 2004).
- ¹⁹ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, p. 53.
- ²⁰ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, p. 54.
- ²¹ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, p. 57.
- ²² Cunningham's 2006 chapter in *Representing the Rural* reiterates many of the contextualizing remarks of his chapter in *The Cinema of Central Europe*. This suggests that his reading of the film became more nuanced, but also more ambiguous after he completed work on *Hungarian Cinema*. See John Cunningham, 'From Arcadia to Collective Farm and Beyond: The Rural in Hungarian Cinema', in Catherine Fowler and Gillian Helfield (eds.) *Representing the Rural: Space, Place and Identity in Films About the Land* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006) pp. 292–306.
- ²³ Cunningham, *Emberek a havason/People on the Mountain*, p. 35.
- ²⁴ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, p. 55.
- ²⁵ Cunningham, *Emberek a havason/People on the Mountain*, p. 36.
- ²⁶ Cunningham, *Emberek a havason/People on the Mountain*, p. 35.
- ²⁷ A separate German boycott of Magyar Film Iroda MFI films, which used the Tobis Klang system under the Pulvári trademark in breach of intellectual property rights,

had already put a strain on Hungary's already difficult relationship with Germany.

The dispute was not resolved until 1942: see *Magyar Film*, 10 (1942), p. 9.

²⁸ The Third Way describes the so-called rural concept of Hungarian nationhood: see János Gyurgyák, *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok: a magyar nemzeteszme és nacionalizmus története* (Budapest: Osiris, 2007); and, for an account of the racist and anti-Semitic aspects of Hungarian eugenicist discourse in English, see Attila Pók, 'The Politics of Hatred: Scapegoating in Interwar Hungary', in Marius Turda and Paul J. Weindling: *Blood and Homeland: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe 1900–1940* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007), pp. 375–88.

²⁹ Cunningham, *Emberek a havason/People on the Mountain*, p. 42.

³⁰ Cunningham, *Emberek a havason/People on the Mountain*, pp. 38–42.

³¹ See for example *Pergőtűzben* (Ágotai, 1937), a romantic melodrama about rival suitors which uses World War 1 combat footage mixed with newly shot material.

³² The contemporary word was de-jewification, or *zsidótlanítás* in the Hungarian. A more frequently used term was the euphemistic 'changing of the guard' or *őrségváltás*. Another was transition or *átállítás*. My account is based on *Magyar Film* (1939–1944). For a contemporary (anti-Semitic) account of the process, see István Hegedűs, *Őrségváltás* (Budapest, 1942); for an academic account from the post-1989 era, see Tibor Sándor: *Őrségváltás* (Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1992) and Tibor Sándor, *Őrségváltás után: zsidókérdés és filmpolitika* (Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1997).

³³ Many decided not to wait to be refused admission to the Chamber and followed the earlier waves of *émigrés*. The director Steve Szekely, the scriptwriter Melchior Lengyel, and the songwriter Paul Abraham were among them. Some found success, while others, such as the comic Gyula Kabos, starved. Not all who were refused

admission could afford to emigrate. Hundreds of Jewish Hungarians in less glamorous positions were ruined by the de-jewification.

³⁴ Bánky was to become a prominent director of anti-Semitic propaganda films.

Hamza took advantage of the de-jewification to set up his own production company.

Farkas, like Bánky, an editor, would go on to direct *Negyedíziglen/To the Fourth Generation* (1942), an anti-Soviet war film, also part of the Hungarian entry in Venice in 1942.

³⁵ János Bingert, *A mozgóképépüzetek és filmügyek rendszete*, ed. Dr Mihály Baik (Budapest: Magyar Mozi és Film, 1928), p.56.

³⁶ Cunningham, *Ember a havason/People on the Mountain*, p. 36.

³⁷ *Magyar Film*, 18 (1939), p. 6.

³⁸ *Magyar Film*, 25 (1939), p. 7.

³⁹ *Magyar Film*, 25 (1942), p. 6.

⁴⁰ *Magyar Film*, 25 (1942), p. 6.

⁴¹ Lajos Pálóczy-Horváth, 'Jaj, az a kétszázadik', in Tibor Sándor, *Őrsékváltás* (Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1992), p. 153.

⁴² I use *folxploitation* as a slightly flippant term to denote highly melodramatic films shot on location in a rural setting, often using non-actors. This was a fairly typical Hungarian genre in the 1931–1944 era.

⁴³ *Magyar Film*, 11 (1942), p. 11.

⁴⁴ *Magyar Film*, 16 (1942).

⁴⁵ *Magyar Film*, 4 (1943), pp. 9–10.

⁴⁶ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, p. 53.

⁴⁷ *Magyar Film*, 33 (1942), p. 1.

⁴⁸ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, p. 53.

⁴⁹ *Magyar Film*, 52 (1943), p. 7.

⁵⁰ This also suggests that it was disgruntlement or a failure to grasp the big picture that inspired the politically inexperienced Szóts's much-quoted diary entry about being told that *People on the Mountain* would not have been given the go-ahead in 1943. Nemeskürty, the Liehms, and Cunningham all cite this diary entry as evidence of his opposition to the regime. It is entirely possible that Szóts was told *People on the Mountain* would not have been approved in 1943 because, after the Soviet breakthrough on the Eastern front in January 1943, the safety of production personnel and equipment could not have been guaranteed on location in Transylvania.

⁵¹ Gyurgyák, *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok*, pp. 230–31.

⁵² Liehm and Liehm, *The Most Important Art*, p. 33.

⁵³ See for instance the work of Lajos Méhely, Hungary's premier eugenicist. His theories are summed up in *Vér és faj/Blood and Race* (Budapest: Bolyai Akadémia, 1940).

⁵⁴ Turda and Weindling, *Blood and Homeland*, p.14. See also Marius Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and 'In Pursuit of Greater Hungary: Eugenic Ideas of Social and Biological Improvement, 1940–1941', *Journal of Modern History*, 85.3 (2013), 558–91.

⁵⁵ Gyurgyák, *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok*, p. 25.

⁵⁶ Ferenc Bíró, *A nemzethalál árnya a XVII. századvég és a XIX. századelő magyar irodalmában* (Pécs: Pro Pannonia Könyvek, 2012).

⁵⁷ Bíró, *A nemzethalál árnya*, pp. 217–19.

⁵⁸ Turda and Weindling, *Blood and Homeland*, p. 206.

⁵⁹ Susan Hayward, 'Framing national cinemas', in Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (eds) *Cinema and Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000), 88–102.

⁶⁰ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, p. 55.

⁶¹ See Pálóczy-Horváth, in Sándor, *Őrsékváltás*, 1992, p. 153.

⁶² Royal Apollo would be renamed *Nemzeti* or National Apollo in 1942 when a statutory instrument was passed banning foreign cinema names. Perhaps the most hair-raising conversion was that of City, which was renamed *Szittyá*, a term that denotes the Hungarian 'race'.

⁶³ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, p. 57.

⁶⁴ The anti-Semites and pro-Nazis who fled to South America included the actors Antal Páger, Zita Szelezky, László Szilassy and Miklós Hajmássy. Propaganda film director Viktor Bánky ended up in Germany. The Vaszarys, a family of prominent rightwing artists and filmmakers, fled to Franco's Spain, as did Lili Muráti.

⁶⁵ Peter Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets: the establishment of the Communist regime in Hungary, 1944-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 47.

⁶⁶ Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, p. 98.

⁶⁷ For example, *Magyar Film*, 16 (1942), p. 6.

⁶⁸ Nemeskürty, *Word and Image*, p. 147.

⁶⁹ The 'Szóts István Emlékkonferencia' took place on 28–29^h September 2012. For a conference programme and brief abstracts in Hungarian see: http://www.uranianf.hu/rendezvenynaptar/120928-29_szots_istvan_emleknapok.php